WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

AN APPENDIX ON FASHION STEWARDSHIP AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP
What Happens Next?

- An appendix on fashion stewardship and social entrepreneurship
“I hear comments sometimes that large oil companies are greedy companies or don’t care. But that is not the case in BP: We care about the small people.”

(Carl-Henric Svanberg, Chairman of BP)
Greenwashing or greedwasing?

In the summer of 2010, a deep-water oil drilling disaster in the Mexican Gulf effectively punctured BP’s attempts to promote itself as an energy company moving “Beyond Petroleum”. Indeed, the oil spill seemed to affirm what some people have argued all along – that the BP re-branding effort is nothing but so-called ”greenwashing”. By overemphasising and exaggerating its green credentials – and its concern for “small people” – the corporation manages to conceal the fact that in the end, it is primarily engaged in the evidently dirty business of extracting oil.

The notion of greenwashing is commonly used to critique corporate efforts to shift towards more sustainable practices. In the end, critics say, corporations are invariably out there to make money. However much we may wish that business could be responsible and ”a force for good”, corporations are effectively hardwired to maximise profits. At the same time, people from the opposite side of the political spectrum would argue that this hardwiring can never be effective enough. Note the exasperation of Gordon Gekko:

”Greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right, greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms; greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge has marked the upward surge of mankind, and greed, you mark my words, will not only save Teldar Paper, but that other malfunctioning corporation called the USA!” (From the film Wall Street)
While dear old Gordon clings to a simplistic understanding of Darwin – evolution does not “surge upwards”, follows no teleology, and is best understood in terms of contingent co-evolution and symbiogenetic processes – we shall not dismiss him out of hand. Indeed, “clarifying” the sphere of business, taking political ambitions and human subjectivity literally out of the equation, is a prerequisite for a the modern market economy. In *Capitalism and Freedom*, economist and Nobel laureate Milton Friedman defends liberal-democratic capitalism on this very basis:

“The kind of economic organization that provides economic freedom directly, namely, competitive capitalism, also promotes political freedom because it separates economic power from political power and in this way enables the one to offset the other.” (Friedman, 1962, cited in Reich, 2006: vii)

Thus, in the classical liberal model of the economy, greed is precisely that which keeps business leaders from becoming “political”, and interfering in the democratic process of governing society. In short, hardwiring greed into business is a means to secure democracy. Adair Turner, an influential British economist and policy-maker, is another strong defender of such a delineation between business and politics:

”The good society is delivered by a robust tension between politically defined constraints and the self-interest and animal spirits of business and entrepreneurs, and it is not always wise to muddy those roles. […] Capitalism flourishes within a clearly understood role for the state as the definer and im-
plementer of wider social objectives.” (Turner, 2001: 376-77)

So, while some people would argue that business cannot be anything other than an “animal”, Gekkoesque quest for profit (the left-wing position), others would argue that it should not be anything but animal (the right-wing position). Nevertheless, aside from the issue of can not versus should not, both sides of the argument tend to construe the economy as something akin to “nature”:
The economy can/should not be a stage for all the cultural and political activities that humans normally engage in. The economic “system” has become something “out there”, in nature. Capitalism is like a big climate system, whose dynamics are beyond our control.

This trope – capitalism as more natural than nature itself – has not least become common among critics of capitalism. In the opening lecture in the film Zizek!, the Lacanian-cum-Marxian philosopher – playing himself – states:

“Think about the strangeness of today’s situation. 30, 40 years ago, we were still debating about what the future will be: Communist, Fascist, Capitalist, whatever. Today, nobody even debates these issues. We all silently accept global capitalism is here to stay. On the other hand, we are obsessed with cosmic catastrophes: the whole life on Earth disintegrating because of some virus, because of an asteroid hitting the Earth, and so on. So the paradox is that it’s much easier to imagine the end of all life on Earth than a much more modest radical change in capitalism, which means that we should reinvent Utopia, but in what sense?” (From the film Zizek!)
Thus, our sense of political impotence stems from our perception that the laws of the economy are as unyielding as the laws that govern biotopes, geological processes, and atmospheric systems. It is as though we have resigned ourselves to accept a very peculiar apocalyptic scenario: with the human species obliterated (be it through pandemics or the collapse of the climate), all that remains is capitalism. The process of capital accumulation, set in motion a couple of hundred years ago, proves more persistent than humanity itself.

However, from science and technology studies, we know that nature is always under negotiation. If naturalisation of the economy is the main problem, maybe we should be more engaged in interfering with what counts as “natural”? Maybe we should try to alter various consensuses regarding whether a certain activity “naturally” fits inside this, already existing, economy? Maybe we should be less focussed on spotting and critiquing “greenwashing”, and more engaged in the active activity of “greedwashing”: Showing that certain activities (such as fair trade production and organic farming) can exist in this naturalised economy, proving that it is compatible with the greed imperative.

Indeed, several social entrepreneurial endeavours can be understood in terms of greedwashing. One obvious case is that of Muhammad Yunus and his work with microfinance. At the outset, his fellow economists warned him of granting credit to poor people without any collateral: Doing so would mean breaking a “natural law of finance”, his endeavour would fall flat onto the ground, just as anyone who dares to defy the laws of gravitation. Nevertheless, Yunus carried on regardless, and ended up “proving” that microfinance does indeed break even
– it may even produce a profit. As a result of this re-
writing of the natural laws of finance, and the concomi-
tant belief that microfinance practices actually have a
place in our “economy of greed”, such practices started
spreading. Thus, the very proof of something “working”
is that which sets a “imitative ray” (sociologist Gabriel
Tarde’s predecessor to the word ”meme”) into motion,
enrolling people to become copiers of a certain idea or
practice. (Tarde, 1899)

There are two provisional points to consider here: First,
would microfinance have spread so rapidly, had it not
been for Yunus and other social entrepreneurs? Let’s
set the problems of contra-factual reasoning aside for
a while, and simply note that no large banks or other
commercial actors found it worthwhile to invest in
microfinance experiments. This leads us towards an
understanding of social entrepreneurship as something
that engages in the “politics of invention”: it's main
impact on society may not be to do social work, and thus
repeat a certain activity over and over again. Rather, its
main impact may be to produce difference, through the
invention of new economic logics. (More about this in the
second half of this text.)

Secondly, how do we evaluate entrepreneurship, if we
judge it on the basis of inventive politics and the crea-
tion of imitative rays? Entrepreneurship tends to be
evaluated in terms of turnover growth and profit rates,
but what if it would be evaluated on the basis of how
many people it ”touches” with a certain idea? Can it
be measured in terms of affects – in the ways in which it
grants people capacities to act, and be acted upon? Or –
to use yet another concept – an it be judged on the basis
of contagion, rather than in terms of bulk?
The case of Dem collective lends itself well to this type of contagion-focussed evaluation. As an active member in the discussion on the problematic aspects of garment industry supply chains, the company has partaken in the effort to “greedwash” practices such as paying living wages – making them seen as natural aspects of the economy. If one evaluates the company in terms of bulk, one might miss the significance of the venture. Measure in terms of “people contaminated”, and the picture looks somewhat different.

This project, regarding the notion of fashion stewardship, implies a shift in focus. Traditionally, entrepreneurs within ”fair trade” (broadly understood) have focussed on ways of making the process of production more transparent and sustainable. This endeavour can also be understood as a form of greedwashing, at least in the cases where entrepreneurs have set off to prove that you can “do business” while making use of fairer supply chains. It is – these actors would argue – neither impossible to construct such a supply, nor impossible to get consumers to pay a premium for such products.

As anthropologist Peter Luetchford writes, the promise of fair trade has been that it may decrease the distance between consumers in the rich world and the producers in the poor world. Seen in this way, he argues, it may alleviate some of the new forms of alienation and commodity fetishism that have emerged in the globalised economy. (Luetchford, 2007) Nevertheless, while this work may decrease the “mental distance” between consumers and producers, it still maintains a rigid relation between the work of the producer and the activities of the consumer. It focuses on the production process – striving to make it more just and transparent – but is less
concerned with “what happens next”, after the point of purchase, after the hand-over to the consumer.

Fashion stewardship, on the other hand, aims to experiment precisely with “what happens next”. Thus, it endeavours to dissolve the delineation between production and consumption: the entrepreneur serves as a relay for getting the consumer more involved in stewarding the garment. Moreover, it concerns itself with engaging with the consumer throughout the life cycle of the product in question. In order to elaborate on the issue of fashion stewardship, let us move to explore contemporary debates within the design discipline.
Design and fashion stewardship

Within many design disciplines there has over the past few decades been a lot of discussion about dematerialised consumption patterns; about shifting the focus in design from material possessions to accessibility and services. During the industrial era we saw services become material products: live music performances became records, hand washing of clothes became the washing machine, etc. This materialization served industrialism well and we came to see a “democratization” of products as more people could afford machines and products to relieve them from hard physical work as well as entertain them during the free time of the days. As we see the environmental impacts of this industrial paradigm, there is an urgency to start thinking differently and dematerialize design, to rethink our relation to design, from design education to the industrial production of objects. A series of design buzzwords touch upon this field of ideas, such as “product service systems”, “service design” and “experience design”.

The idea of designing dematerialized services is nothing new and we are so used to house rentals, hotels, taxis and restaurants that we hardly think of them as designed systems. They are clever processes totally integrated in our everyday and their implications differ between countries and regions. In Scandinavia for example most apartment blocks share common washing machines and driers and most think this is very normal, while in other countries most people who can afford have a washing machine in their apartment.

The automotive industries are exploring how to go from the production of cars to the design of transportation,
thus taking a step back and re-evaluate the core values of the car manufacturing industry itself. Yet they are not totally unprepared. The car industry has for a long time put a careful attention to its customers, with designed warranties, insurances and leasing schemes to offer the owner much more than the car itself. The “after-market”, where end-users are offered support from the manufacturer, is a big part of the automobile industry, for good and bad, as we can experience in everything from the advantage of authorized repair centres to extremely expensive spare parts.

Today car pools are widely discussed among transportation designers, with successful projects like Zipcar in the US or Greenwheels in the Netherlands, and also the organized systems for hitching and ride-sharing systems that have been common in many countries in Europe, such as the “Mitfahr” (hitcher) services in Germany. Lately new mobile services of ride-sharing, like open-ride.com, have been developed to make ride-sharing more convenient and hitching safer. Both governments and industries take dematerialization seriously when it comes to cars.

Why have we seen so little of this thinking from the fashion industries? Indeed, some would argue that fashion is the dematerialized aspect of clothes and fashion as a phenomenon has perhaps more to do with lifestyle today than with clothes. But why are there so few examples of organized fashion service systems? Why are there no authorized Zara repair centres in town? How does H&M help me get the right spare parts when the zipper breaks? There are many independent shops in which to rent clothes for special occasions, such as masquerades, or shirt-washing services and local tailors
to make customized suits and repair clothes, but in general the industry itself has been slow at tying customers closer to their brands with various forms of services.

In recent years there has been some experiments though. It has become possible to rent exclusive handbags over the Internet or subscribe to design t-shirts, such as threadless.com. Especially underwear subscriptions have taken off, such as the Swiss firm Blacksocks with their “sockscriptions”.

If we look at the “after-market” of clothing there has always been rag trade and second-hand stores, but we can also see the emergence of more organized systems. The British designer Amy Twigger-Holroyd has started a brand, Riot and Return, from which parents can lease children’s clothes which are returned to be mended centrally. Every garment also gets the child’s initials embroidered on the label to visualize the different generations of wearers. The Swedish brand Filippa K opened a second hand store in Stockholm especially for their customers’ used clothes and the child wear company Polarn o Pyret has an on-line bazaar where parents can buy and sell used garments from the brand. The Dutch jeans brand Denham the Jeanmaker has videos on YouTube about how you can mend and service your jeans.

Many of these initiatives derive from today’s environmental agenda with an emphasis on sustainable transitions in consumer culture and this perspective have been taken seriously by many fashion companies. But so far it seems almost everything happens at the producerside of the equation, and we only have a few examples of serious post-purchase services. In production we see many certification processes and quality controls
become common regarding everything from ecological cotton cultivation and non-toxic dyeing processes to labour conditions and shipping. But so far little focus is put on how garments live their lives with the consumers, even if this part of the life cycle is having a huge impact on the environment. Not to mention the thousands of tons of “outdated” garments that become landfill every year, often with mixed fibres and still with high values of toxic patricides in the fabric.

If we want to see changes in the consumption patterns of fashion or the attitudes among consumers we will have to design systems which includes them and takes their role in the lifecycle of clothing seriously. We will have to create a “declaration of dependence” between producers and consumers, as the production phase is a very small part of the garments life and environmental affect. Yet we can design and engineer these behaviours. Just like the sharing of transport in car-pools or the Turkish dolmus-minibus systems. If we include the actions of consumers and usage-patterns also in fashion design, we might create new forms of “fashion stewardship”. In this way, we can influence and tune behavioural, cultural and industrial systems relating to fashion into a more desirable direction.

So let us first look at production. Dem collective has shown that fair labour issues as well as ecologically sound production is possible within fashion industry. Yet, for a wider impact the rate of consumption and the role of the relation between the fashion firm and the consumers has also to be questioned. New processes and design strategies for deeper consumer involvement is needed for the future, and that step Dem collective aims to take with their concept of Fashion Stewardship.
Over the last decades a lot has happened in consumer knowledge and company standards addressing issues on sustainability in clothes production. Many toxic dyeing processes have been replaced with environmentally better procedures and the ethical codes of conduct are improving but still have a long way to go. However, when examining ethical and sustainable fashion production we immediately encounter its most fundamental problem: it is focused on the line of production and does not include the consumer.

Up to 80 percent of the energy used in a garment's lifetime is used in washing (Fletcher, 2008). Consumers wash too often, too hot and tumble dry their clothes, which has a great impact on the environmental footprint of their clothes. Several strategies are encouraged to counter this behaviour, for example using synthetic fibres, which can be cleaned in lower temperatures than cotton, and which can also be recycled into new threads and fabric. As garments have different “metabolism”, they are used in different cycles, some party tops go out of fashion quick while jeans may last longer, and thus call for different sustainable strategies. As fashion theorist Kate Fletcher shows in her research, party tops should perhaps be composted after use, while jeans should be made to last longer. Other suggestions have been to promote services with centralized washing and library-like services for clothes from which users can borrow garments for shorter use.

A complementary approach could be to create life-time service systems for clothes. Such systems could be supported by the fashion brands themselves, making the consumer feel more attached to their garments. As mentioned before, here fashion has a lot to learn from the
car industry. There could be a deeper relation between producers and consumers where the user is encouraged by the fashion companies to take care of their garments.

Some fashion companies already offer specialized services of washing, reinforcement, repair and patching. Famous examples are the Barbour jackets or Hermes bags, but it is usually confined to the luxury or technical niche of apparel. Yet, even the cheapest car would have a service system close at hand if it would break down.

Even if they decrease in numbers, there are a lot of street tailors to do such repair and alteration services. But when taking sustainability seriously, a company could easily commit more to support services to make users feel a deeper engagement with their clothes and services also offer the brand an exposure as committed both to sustainability and the long-term satisfaction of the consumer. With such service approach fashion brands could investigate the inclusion and design of other affects than the constant reinvention of the “latest” style, or the flashy contagious affect with the arrival of the new.

One such example, which could be supported by services from the fashion industry, could be the issue of how affect is multiplied with the engagement of care and repair. Old and carefully repaired clothes inherit another form of promise than fashion; that of continuous attention, of lasting affection, of careful handling and sincerity. It reveals modesty and virtue. The fabric may be broken, but the repair shows that the affection is unbroken. As the hole is mended, new attention is added. Hope is fused into the material and form. Self-reliance and trust emanates from repair, and these are values of-
ten communicated or simulated through brand images. A beautiful patching is a manifestation of careful love, a caress of time, and such affects could be intensified by post-purchase services. Lasting affection, sincerity and compassion, fashion has never, so far, been able to commit to. But the “utopian” ideas of Fashion Stewardship could be the arena where new values and practices are created with fashion industry.

To support such approach a new designer role for the fashion designer is necessary. This role is not only that of the idea generator and producer, but the diffuser of skills. Such skills evolve along two main lines. First, we have skills of attention and appreciation, which are built on information and transparency. This is a quite common path, which over the last years has been taken by many companies, where they make their production traceable and translucent. Consumers can follow the whole line of production where fibres can be traced all the way back to the sheep or cotton harvest. Workers are interviewed, factories checked and costs are displayed. The ideal of such information is to make consumers feel trust towards the production process and also to appreciate the full workmanship invested by the producer in its products.

The second set of skills is the skills of craft, repair and tactile sensation. Here, the touch and attention of care is transposed into affects. Skills in mending and updates could be supported by services in stores or with certified tailors, as it also raises the attention of the quality of garments; their cut, seams, draping, fabric and details. Which designers do not want attentive customers who cherish their designs and smart cuts? Such skills lead to empowerment and a consumer situation where the
company actually contributes to the action spaces of the user. With earned skills the consumer can reappropriate the whole wardrobe, all garments, and not only the ones supported by the brand.

The clean production and manufacturing, as well as the establishment of post-purchase services is what fashion stewardship is about. The service systems explored here are not pacifying ones, but focus on the multiplication of interfaces and affects by which fashion can be connected to consumers. Today the dominant interface is the situation of purchase – a consumer can only access the brand by buying ready-to-wear products. But by supporting these with chains of services and events, not only would the garments live longer, but the consumers could become more engaged.

We could imagine deeper implementations of services and affects produced by fashion designers. For such affective services, designers could learn from many other fields – such as barbers. At the barber you do not only get your hair cut. You are offered a rich variety of affects, not too dissimilar to what fashion offers: a journey of transformation, the possibility of confession and local gossip, service of nails and skin, and care in general – a full treatment for body and soul. Actually, at a full fledged barber visit, the haircut might be of secondary interest. What would the fashion equivalent look like? And how do we make fashion designers and brands more curious on such services? Fashion needs to learn the skills of manipulating the fashion affects rather than binding them into products.
The economy as fashion

How, then, are we to understand Dem collective in this context? In what way does a social entrepreneur operate on the above-mentioned level of affects? Here, it can be useful to split the concept of social entrepreneurship into two. We must ask ourselves: What is the social, and what is an entrepreneur?

First; “the social”. 19th century social science has predominantly depicted this concept as a thick soup, in which individual humans are submerged. Since we are all swimming in this social soup, we are invariably determined by it. However much we want to escape it – and thus become the free human beings that we could be – social norms always delimit our freedoms. Social science has therefore attempted to describe such norms and through hard statistics: If surveys show that 68 percent of design students love Chanel, the individual student submerged in the social is only 32 percent free to not love Chanel.

There is, however, another way of understanding the social. From this alternative perspective, our subjectivities emerge only when we are massed together. When humans are placed in association with each other, making it possible for them to communicate with each other, to affect and to be affected by others, they are also rendered open to various forms of contagion. We become what we are when we become vehicles for the spread of ideas, viruses, desires, genetic replicators, capacities, and beliefs.

There is, from this perspective, no rational individual human being "outside of” or "beyond” mass phenomena. Rather, it is through the spread of various fashions that
we become what we are. Many of us have the *Chanel* virus in us, carrying it with us through an “infolding” in our brains. Existing both inside and outside our minds, the virus can then replicate itself through other people. Being infected does not necessarily delimit our freedoms to act: On the contrary, it grants us certain capacities to act.

For instance, having contracted – or, alternatively, *appropriated* – the virus, it may assist us when we “Chanelify” a certain garment or object. Moreover, as this *Chanel* virus cross-breeds with other cultural replicators that we have contracted elsewhere, it may transmutate into new, previously unknown capacities. Indeed, to have a body is to learn to be affected by, and how to affect, other bodies. That is why philosopher Spinoza said that we do not know what the body can do. So, from this position, it makes no sense to look *inside* ourselves to understand our capacities to act – those capacities are always generated *in-between* us and other entities.

The alternative perspective of the social also implies an alternative understanding of the economy. Traditional views of the economy posit that we, as consumers or entrepreneurs, act as rational actors choosing to purchase a certain product, or entering a certain venture. In essence, humans are construed as atoms – autonomous beings with stable properties. Our alternative perspective posits that we are not at all stable and autonomous. Rather, plasticity is the key characteristic of our minds – we carry infinite possibilities to contract/appropriate new beliefs and new desires, infinite possibilities to affect and be affected. Note the difference with the traditionalist view of “the social”: Rather than a social that keeps free individuals in line with fixed norms, the
association of our minds may be precisely that which generates change.

From this perspective, the economy can be understood as consisting of not one but two forms of circulation. First, we have the circulation of goods, services and money; the “economy of bulk” that economists have been charting during the past couple of centuries. Indeed, there are good reasons for describing economics as something that revolves around the management of scarce resources – especially in a world where new forms of scarcity are emerging. However, the circulation of matter and money – the economy of bulk – coexists with a circulation of contagious desires and beliefs, the circulation of affects, described above.

The two forms of circulation are interlaced with each other: The flow of money, goods and natural resources is determined by the shifting patterns and rhythms of desires and beliefs. Bubble economies are created by turbulent shifts in the belief in a certain future, oil dependence is created through a desire for a certain lifestyle. Note the swift rise and equally rapid decline of the use of certain commodities: Here, it is contagious fashions – shifts in desire and beliefs, and the emergence of new knowledges regarding extraction and industry – that govern the flow of resources. In other words, “fashion” is not to be understood as a sector of the economy dominated by LVMH and other luxury conglomerates – in a sense, the economy is nothing but fashions.

The existence of this other economy – the circulation of desire and belief, which is enabled by massing together of humans – can be seen both as a curse and a blessing. As it stands today, one may argue that our more or
less non-conscious imitative behaviour has implied that many of us lead lives that are not conducive to a shift towards more sustainable modes of life on earth. Rather than participating in the invention of new ways of life, we tend to repeat the already-existing ways of participating in the making of society.

However, there is a flip-side of the coin. Yes, we may be somnambulists, engaged in semi-hypnotic imitation of certain models of behaviour, but there is nothing "outside" such hypnosis. Again, society and economy should be understood in terms of what happens in-between us, not inside us: Inter-psychology configures our intra-psychologies.

Therefore, the plasticity of our minds should lead us to shift our attention to the creation of new modes of life. How are new models of behaviour, more worthy of copying, created? How can we account for the successful births of social inventions, which open up spaces for alternative futures? After all, politics is not the “art of the possible”, but rather the process by which something previously thought impossible is magically made into a possible – and likely – future trajectory.
Entrepreneurship as social activism

It is here, in the “politics of invention”, that we come across the “entrepreneur”. How are we to understand this character? On the one hand, we have the traditional conception of the entrepreneur as the person sets up an economic venture. On the other, we have the somewhat more generic, contemporary notion of the entrepreneur as anyone who undertakes a venture or act of creation of any sort. In between those two – both historically and conceptually – we have the economist Joseph Schumpeter’s notion of the unternehmer who brings new combinations to the market.

The conception of entrepreneurship used in this text can be seen as a hybrid of those three perspectives: It has to do with cross-breeding and combinations, it therefore has to do with creation, but also involves operating in the increasingly naturalised space called “the economy” or “the market”. Drawing upon the argument above, we can state the following: If the economy is not only a machine for the coordination of means and ends – the management of scarce resources – but also a machine for the propagation of fashions, we can see entrepreneurs as the trendsetters that invent new ways of being.

What, then, distinguishes such social entrepreneurs from social activists? From one point of view, we can argue that entrepreneurship and activism is the same thing. As discussed in section one, the separation of the two is a modern construct; something that emerged when we first came to view the economy as a special part of society, determined by the natural laws of “the market” or “capitalism”, completely devoid of politics, culture and subjectivity. In this modern world, an act of creation had
to be firmly located in either the economic field (the naturalised circulation of objects) or the cultural field (where human subjects bicker about politics, power and ideologies). (Latour, 1993) The former type of creation was called “entrepreneurship”, the latter “activism”.

Today, however, this modern constitution seems increasingly untenable. Consider the recent debates around the BitTorrent-tracker *The Pirate Bay*: An act of entrepreneurship (the creation of a new technical solution, taken to the market), but equally an act of activism (the creation of a radical opening of the future of “cognitive capitalism”). Hence the dilemma of the judges and the lawyers – how do you tell whether *The Pirate Bay* is merely a company operating on an objective market, or a politico-ideological set-up? Is it a matter of skilled programmers finding a new possibility in the assemblage of digitalised media and fiber optic cables, or is it a matter of delinquents waging a war against copyrights?

Another example of the current problematisation of the delineation between ”objective business” and ”subjective politics” is *AdBusters Magazine’s Blackspot Sneaker*. In this project, the anti-capitalist magazine puts pressure on large, supposedly irresponsible corporations by putting a new product on the market, while experimenting with the governance structures of the *Blackspot* organisation.

In this way, the contested constitution of the modern economy – the crisis of economic modernity – provides us with a way of distinguishing the social entrepreneur from the traditional social activist. Whereas social activism traditionally involves human subjects trying to
enroll other human subjects to a certain cause, actors like The Pirate Bay also enroll non-human objects in the mobilising of a new world. Similarly, Adbusters Magazine is entering the supposedly objective world of business with its highly politicised shoe. Indeed, if the economy is increasingly seen as a space more natural than nature itself – again, will capitalism outlive the planet? – the most effective way of creating new economic logics is to change its nature. The birth of new objects, such as a BitTorrent-tracker or a Blackspot sneaker, changes the circulation of goods and services, as well as the circulation of beliefs and desires.

The social entrepreneur can thus be understood as someone that experiments with what the socio-economic apparatus is capable of. Again, entrepreneurs within fair trade and organic products are exploring whether there is space for certain production methods within the contemporary economy. As such, they are very much acting like scientists: Using the economy as a laboratory, testing whether a certain mode of doing things “works” on the market or not. If the alternative mode of doing things does work, it becomes mobile, and ends up spreading across the economy, becoming subject to imitation by other actors.

However, that which does not remain from the traditional notion of entrepreneurship is the idea of the Great Man unternehmer – the forceful Man of Action – envisaged by Joseph Schumpeter. Nor does the humanist notion of the “creative human being” remain: As there is no human being outside of the contagion of intellectual fashions, there can be no autonomous Great Man who engages in entrepreneurship. Nor can there be collectives of individual, autonomous humans. Rather than isolated
atoms consciously positioning themselves in relation to others, we have to think of a swarming mass of monads, acting in concert, as a result of the contagion of desires and beliefs.

In other words, we have to let go of the cosy idea of the great entrepreneur who acts on his or her own accord. Rather, the active agent is the model that is being imitated. Here, it is useful to move from Schumpeter to the theories of sociologist Gabriel Tarde. For the former, the entrepreneur is driven by "the dream and the will to found a private kingdom, usually, though not necessarily, also a dynasty" (Schumpeter, 1934). Tarde forces us to shift perspectives, seeing the world as the innovation sees it. He thus states that "an industrial good, a verse, a formula, a political idea, which has appeared one day somewhere in the corner of a brain, dreams like Alexander of conquering the world, tries to multiply itself by thousands and millions of copies in every place where there exist human beings". (Tarde, 1893, cited in Latour, 2002)

In other words, the agent of imperialistic ambition is not the entrepreneur, but the invention itself, bent on replicating itself through humans massed together. Similarly, the social entrepreneur is therefore not to be understood as someone who does something "in the social" or "in society". Rather, it is a point or event – as the place where a certain contagion cross-pollinates with another contagion, the place where a new contagion gathers force through becoming mobile.
Critique and invention

A social enterprise is sometimes defined as an organisation set up to "meet the unmet needs of society". This makes a lot of sense in the context of an "enterprise" perspective on social entrepreneurship: The enterprise is an economic entity, made (economically) sustainable by virtue of the fact that it sells a certain product or service to a market. However, if one takes an "innovation" perspective, the notion of "meeting a need" may cause us to overlook interesting aspects of what a social entrepreneur can do. The innovation perspective tends to highlight the radical openness associated with the moment of invention. In its purest form, it does not so meet a pre-existing need, but rather creates a new world – potentially shifting what we recognise as "needs".

Consider one of the most influential industrial "social" innovations: Back in the 1950s, we did not know that we "need" seat belts in cars – they were even resisted when they were introduced. A few years down the line, however, these same seat belts came to be seen as obligatory ways of meeting the need for safer cars.

The issue becomes even more interesting if we consider the ways in which some social innovations influence economic action. The functioning of the economy is tightly intertwined with "economics" (theories about the economy, and how humans operate within it). In other words, economics not only describes the economy, but also assists in the construction of economies.

This is not so much a matter of "social" construction, but rather the socio-technical construction of the economy. Thus, theories about homo oeconomicus have promped the development of innovative information and com-
munications technologies that assist financial traders in their calculative behaviour. In the same way, theories around the social side effects of the global economy have prompted innovations such as "fair trade" labelling of goods, thus shaping "economic" behaviour. (In other words, it becomes "natural" for us to take such side effects "into the equation" when we purchase something.) Indeed, some of the most interesting social entrepreneurs are engaged in "hacking the economy":

We have already discussed Muhammad Yunus’ experiments with new logics of credit.

In that way, it is the very construction of the economy that is at stake – which components can be plugged into the economy, making it act in novel ways? What other capacities and logics can be teased out of the economic infrastructure? Seen in this way, some social entrepreneurs are engaged in inventing new economies. These entrepreneurs may set off to "prove" that a certain activity can be sustainable within the economy as we know it. Again, consider the fair trade movement, which can be seen as an effort to prove that it is possible to construct "responsible" and transparent supply chains – and still break even as a business.

As also discussed above, once this "proof" has been constructed, this model may be copied infinitely. The entrepreneur, on the other hand, may well be completely dispassionate about the "repetition" of the model that s/he just made viable – and move on to prove that some other logic "works". Thus, from a Tarde-inspired perspective, the "innovation school" focuses on the invention/difference aspects of the economic process, while the "enterprise school" focuses on the imitation/repetition aspects – the ones that relate to "meeting a need".
There is another way of juxtaposing the notion of "inventing new economies" with the notion of "meeting an unmet need": Whereas the latter may lead us to think that the economy is already constructed, the former makes us more attuned to the fact that there are infinite ways in which the economy could function. Where does that leave the researchers studying social entrepreneurs?

Sociologist Michel Callon suggests that scholars who want to engage with society should assist in experiments to construct such new logics. While there are a few "models of behaviour" that dominate the construction of the economy (homo oeconomicus, "business as we know it" etc.), there are alternative models of economic behaviour (such as open source programming) that can be elaborated upon. Researchers – whether they like to call themselves "critical" or not – should therefore assist in these experiments:

"An anthropology ... that claims to be critical should study these devices intended for all Davids dreaming of ousting Goliaths. How can one ensure that the success of Linux and its anthropology of applied econom(y)ics, which is causing Microsoft so much concern and forcing it to alter its strategy, does not remain a miraculous exception served by exceptional circumstances?" (Callon, 2005)

This focus on hands-on invention chimes with Zizek's plea for the re-invention of utopia. In the speech mentioned above, he continues: "The true Utopia is when the situation is so without issue, without a way to resolve it within the coordinates of the possible, that out of the pure urge of survival you have to invent a new space."
Invention and politics are therefore intrinsically linked. Here, it is worth considering that

“in terms of the well-known definition of politics as the 'art of the possible': authentic politics is, rather, the exact opposite, that is, the art of the impossible – it changes the very parameters of what is considered 'possible' in the existing constellation.” (Zizek, 1999: 199)

Politics as invention: It is this approach that we must bring with us in our understanding of both design and business. The "social" in concepts such as "social design" or "social entrepreneurship" should lead us towards exploring the ways in which designers and entrepreneurs can shift our capacities, our abilities to affect and be affected, our beliefs and desires.

From this perspective, adding the "social" to design or entrepreneurship does not merely signify a care for "society". More precisely, it should signify a move away from the interest in simply "designing products" or "generating profits" as such – and an deepened interest in how design and entrepreneurship can operate within the realm of capacities and affects. As Tarde writes; it is the shifting flows of beliefs and desires that propel the mills of politics, and the storms of history.
6. References


What is fashion stewardship?

What is greedwashing?

How does critique relate to invention?

In recent years, social entrepreneurship has emerged as a popular vehicle for producing social change. However, in order to explore this phenomenon further, notions of “the social” and “entrepreneurship” must be exploded. In this text - a theoretical appendix to the picture book *What Happens Next?* - von Busch and Palmås discuss the concept of fashion stewardship in relation to a politics of invention.